Written into the culture – how Opera Mini became a hit song in Nigeria

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Some milestones arrive in a quarterly report. This one arrived on the radio.

In June, Nigerian artists Seyi Vibez and Poco Lee released a track called "Opera Mini," and it started climbing the charts in Nigeria. The song has since racked up 6.9 million streams on Spotify and 3 million views on YouTube. We had no involvement in it: no sponsorship, no collaboration, no heads-up. We found out at the same time as everyone else, which is the best part. Seyi Vibez is one of the defining voices of contemporary Afrobeats with 1.7 billion Spotify streams, and Poco Lee, with 6 million Instagram followers, has spent years shaping music discovery and dance trends across Nigeria and beyond. Neither of them needed to explain the title to their listeners. Everybody already knew what Opera Mini was.

That is a milestone we have been quietly working toward for nearly two decades, and we think it is worth explaining what sits underneath it.

Africa First, nineteen years in

Opera was among the very first tech companies to bet on Africa, and we have been building here for more than 19 years. Under our Africa First strategy, our mobile products are designed for the African consumer first and with the local needs in mind, rather than adapted from something built for other markets, and we invest in the region every year.

Nineteen years of that has made Opera Mini something other than a browser choice. For a very large number of Nigerians, Opera Mini was the first internet they ever used, and it is still how they get online today. It brought people onto the web in the first place and then stayed with them through every phone they have owned since.

Opera Mini was built for a specific, stubborn problem: mobile data in sub-Saharan Africa is among the most expensive in the world relative to income; and it solves that problem with compression technology that lets people browse the same web while using dramatically less data. Users across Nigeria, Kenya, South Africa and a few more select markets today also benefit from the daily free data offering. More than a billion downloads on Google Play later, it is the one of the most downloaded browsers on the continent, and our brand awareness in our biggest African markets reaches as high as 94%.

Around it we have built an ecosystem that reflects how people in the region actually use the internet. Over the past several years we have:

1. Opened local data centers in Lagos and Nairobi, accelerating browsing in our apps by up to four times
2. Partnered with leading operators including MTN, Airtel and Safaricom to give tens of millions of people free browsing through Opera Mini
3. Grown Opera News, launched in 2017, past 100 million downloads
4. Given users free access to thousands of ebooks through our partnership with Worldreader

5. Launched MiniPay, our stablecoin wallet, bringing dollar savings and near-instant, low-cost transfers to users across Africa and those who moved abroad

What our Nigerian user base actually looks like

More than a quarter of these users open Opera Mini every single week, using the browser as the main getaway to the web. Close to four in ten Nigerian smartphone users have had Opera Mini for more than a year, nearly one in five for more than two years, and close to one in ten for more than three.

And engagement grows with tenure, rather than fading. This is the finding we find most encouraging. A user of three years or more is over 1.5 times as likely to open Opera Mini on any given day as someone who installed it in the past day.

Underpinning all of it is the reason Opera Mini exists in the first place. Nigeria's internet penetration sits at around 50%, and the cost of data remains a real constraint on how much time people can afford to spend online. Our compression technology saves smartphone users in Nigeria data month after month, a saving people feel directly in their airtime balance. That also plays out in moments like the World Cup, when more than a third of our Nigerian users turned to Live Scores to follow matches and updates, spending a fraction of the data to do it.

A stable base, weekly and daily routines, tenure measured in years, engagement that deepens over time, and a core function tied to a cost people genuinely feel. Taken together, that is a durable user base, acquired largely organically, in the market with the fastest-growing internet penetration in the world and hundreds of millions of people still to come online.

It is also the platform for everything else we are building in the region. Users who trust Opera Mini are the users we introduce to Opera News, MiniPay and other layers that Opera Mini's reach makes possible. Growth in Africa compounds off the same foundation the song is standing on.